

Selecting Mentors and Pairing with Protégés

Selecting mentors can be a challenge for schools. Best practice indicates that teachers should be willing to fill the mentor role and not be pressured into mentoring a beginning teacher. A school or district that is developing a mentor program must determine how mentors will be recruited and selected. In general, a mentor should have at least three to five years teaching experience, and have a proven track record of positive effect on student achievement. Many times, teachers who would make good mentors are held in high esteem by colleagues and the school administration, and may be serving on more than one school or district committee.

Sample application forms for mentors are available in the forms section of the Teacher Mentor Program Development Template.

Listed below are sample characteristics and qualities of effective mentors.

Attitude and Character

- Willing to be a role model for other teachers
- Exhibits strong commitment to the teaching profession
- Believes mentoring improves instructional practice
- Willing to advocate on behalf of colleagues
- Willing to receive training to improve mentoring skills
- Demonstrates a commitment to lifelong learning
- Is reflective and able to learn from mistakes
- Is eager to share information and ideas with colleagues
- Is resilient, flexible, persistent, and open-minded
- Exhibits good humor and resourcefulness
- Enjoys new challenges and solving problems

Communication Skills

- Is able to articulate effective instructional strategies
- Listens attentively
- Asks questions that prompt reflection and understanding
- Offers critiques in positive and productive ways
- Uses email effectively
- Is efficient with the use of time
- Conveys enthusiasm, passion for teaching
- Is discreet and maintains confidentiality

Professional Competence and Experience

- Is regarded by colleagues as an outstanding teacher
- Has excellent knowledge of pedagogy and subject matter
- Has confidence in his/her own instructional skills
- Demonstrates excellent classroom-management skills
- Feels comfortable being observed by other teachers
- Maintains a network of professional contacts
- Understands the policies and procedures of the school, district, and teachers' association
- Is a meticulous observer of classroom practice
- Collaborates well with other teachers and administrators
- Is willing to learn new teaching strategies from protégés

Interpersonal Skills

- Is able to maintain a trusting professional relationship
- Knows how to express care for a protégé's emotional and professional needs
- Is attentive to sensitive political issues
- Works well with individuals from different cultures
- Is approachable; easily establishes rapport with others
- Is patient

Source: *Creating a Teacher Mentoring Program*. The NEA Foundation for the Improvement of Education: Washington, DC, 1999.

Pairing Mentors and Protégés

There is no magic formula to making a “perfect” match for mentors and protégés. Areas to consider are the available mentors, mentor and protégés’ strengths and weaknesses, learning styles, and the goals of the school or district mentor program.

Although ideal matches appear to be one mentor to one protégé, other models exist. E-mentoring, using e-mail and telephone to communicate between the mentor and protégé: might be useful for a small rural school district where the best mentor option may be over a hundred miles away.

Another model allows the mentor to be a referral person, not the person with all of the answers. For example, a protégé might have some difficulty with classroom management; if the mentor does not have strength in this area he/she would refer the protégé to a teacher with that strength. In this model, districts could have different mentors designated for each instructional area, grade level, or other teaching issues.

It is important for the school or district to determine the goals of the mentor program prior to pairing mentors and protégés.

Problem Solving with Mentor Protégé Pairings

Most mentor research describes that 90 percent of the mentor-protégé relationships work out well. There are 10 percent of the pairings that can have a range of challenges. The mentor/protégé can be a close relationship that has typical ups and downs. When developing a mentor program, the school or district should address how a mentor and protégé pairing that is not successful will be handled. Oftentimes the best option is to reassign the mentor and protégé; however, this should be outlined in the program information.

If a school or district is finding that each year they are having difficulty with at least one mentor/protégé relationship, they may want to provide additional professional development for the mentors in the areas of communication and using coaching language.